

Permit withdrawal halts Molokai fishpond project

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A Molokai resident says he still plans to rebuild an ancient Hawaiian fishpond, although work on the project has stopped with the withdrawal of a federal permit.

"That's OK — I am happy to be the pioneer," said Lance "Kip" Dunbar, who halted work recently on the Ipu Kai'ole Fishpond wall at the request of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"If we can persevere and put it all in place, it will be easier for the next one."

But one of Dunbar's neighbors said he will continue to fight the Kainalu resident's attempts to reconstruct the fishpond near his house on Molokai's south shore.

"People really support reconstruction of the Hawaiian fishponds for the public benefit, but in this case it's not an authentic reconstruction," said George Peabody, who has covered the issue in his Molokai Advertiser News.

Peabody said his complaint led the Army Corps to issue a July 18 order stopping work.

This week, the corps announced it was withdrawing a permit it had granted earlier and asked Dunbar to apply for another permit that covers more extensive work.

Lt. Col. James Muratsuchi, the corps' Honolulu district command-

er, said the corps was acting on new information.

"But the ultimate responsibility to base our decision on the course most beneficial to the public interest has not changed," he said.

Dunbar's plan for the fishpond will be circulated for public comment before the corps decides whether to grant the permit.

Dunbar said he has been told the process could take up to a year.

He said his project is compatible with the goal of restoring the island's 60 fishponds to promote economic development. He said he plans to raise moi.

Peabody suspects other motives. "I see it as a land grab under the facade of Hawaiian culture and aquaculture."

Peabody also questioned the legitimacy of using backhoes, but Dunbar said he is taking advantage of new technology to create a replica of his ancestors' work.

"You can be sure that if the ancient Hawaiians had the backhoe, they certainly would have used it," he said.

He denied that he is building the fishpond to acquire land.

He said the fishpond wall was about 30 percent complete when work stopped.

"We have lost the best tides, lost the best season. . . . But the fishponds were here 500 years ago. They'll be here next year."